

Even as we consider strategies to create jobs right now, it's vital that we ensure that the next generation of workers is prepared to compete in the global economy. To compete, American students must possess, but far too often lack, a knowledge of other languages and cultures.

Unfortunately, the United States, as former Senator Paul Simon once said, is a "linguistically malnourished" nation. Only 44 percent of high school students are enrolled in foreign language courses, while only 31 percent of elementary schools offer foreign language instruction.

As I discussed at a [summit on foreign language](#) organized by the CIA, we need to alter dramatically how our children learn languages. Already Congress has established, [by my legislation](#)

, [upfront grants and loan forgiveness](#)

, up to \$16,000, for individuals who become foreign language teachers. Congress also must pass

[my legislation](#)

to establish structures for language training that starts in kindergarten and never truly stops. We also must better utilize the language talents of native speakers who have much to offer our still malnourished nation.

Tragedy in Israel

My thoughts and prayers are with the Israeli people as they recover from wildfires that killed 42 and displaced about 17,000 people. In addition to the human tragedy, the fire – which began in Israel's Carmel Forest near Haifa - scorched more than 12,000 acres of forestland and burned more than 5 million trees.

The fires that began December 2 thankfully are now under control, due to the response of the

Israelis and the contributions of 24 countries, including Israel's neighbors, Egypt, Jordan, Greece, and Turkey. I appreciate the swift response of the United States. The [Department of Defense and USAID](#) mobilized more than 80 metric tons of fire retardant for immediate transport to the affected areas.

Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Last week marked the 50th anniversary of the creation of the [Arctic National Wildlife Refuge \(ANWR\)](#). President Eisenhower designated the reserve in December 1960 "for the purpose of preserving unique wildlife, wilderness, and recreational values" of North East Alaska. The reserve was expanded by President Jimmy Carter in 1980, further recognizing the breathtaking landscape and stunning diversity of wildlife that inhabit the area.

The Arctic Refuge is the only completely protected Arctic ecosystem in the U.S. and one of our country's environmental crown jewels. Stretching from the plains of the Arctic Sea to the soaring mountains of the Brooks Range and lush boreal forests of the Alaskan lowlands, ANWR protects critical breeding and migratory habitat for over 200 species. The very essence of ANWR is that it is pristine and untouched. While they may not have visited the reserve, I have heard from hundreds of constituents who understand the value that our public lands have to all Americans and who want ANWR protected from oil and gas drilling. I have also heard from many who think the U.S. should allow oil and gas drilling in ANWR. I respectfully disagree - a few extra tablespoons of oil for our gas tanks are not worth irreparably damaging this national treasure.

You can view photos and learn more information about ANWR [here](#).